

A Road to Peace in Lebanon?

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Israel, the U.S., and the yet-again submissive Britain are now totally isolated in their collusive attack on Lebanon. As the emergency meeting on Lebanon in Rome collapsed Wednesday, a U.S. official described Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as being “under siege” for her position that a ceasefire must include a permanent disarming of Hezbollah militants.[\[1\]](#)

As Israel rains U.S. bombs on civilians, ambulances, and even the United Nations monitoring force, the world’s states and world public opinion appear impotent to affect this situation. The obvious venue for action – the UN Security Council – is stymied by the U.S. veto.

There is a possible way forward. Under a procedure called “Uniting for Peace,” the UN General Assembly can demand an immediate unconditional ceasefire and withdrawal.

When Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal in 1956, Britain, France, and Israel invaded Egypt and began advancing on the Suez Canal. U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower demanded that the invasion stop. Resolutions in the UN Security Council called for a cease-fire-but Britain and France vetoed them. Then the United States appealed to the General Assembly and proposed a resolution calling for a cease-fire and a withdrawal of forces. The General Assembly held an emergency session and passed the resolution. Britain and France withdrew from Egypt within a week.

The appeal to the General Assembly was made under a procedure called “Uniting for Peace.” This procedure was adopted by the Security Council so that the UN can act even if the Security Council is stalemated by vetoes. Resolution 377 provides that, if there is a “threat to peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression” and the permanent members of the Security Council do not agree on action, the General Assembly can meet immediately and recommend collective measures to U.N. members to “maintain or restore international peace and security.” The “Uniting for Peace” mechanism has been used ten times, most frequently on the initiative of the United States.

There was a significant global effort to use the Uniting for Peace procedure to head off the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Lawyers at the [Center for Constitutional Rights](#) drafted a proposed “Uniting for Peace” declaring military action without a Security Council resolution authorizing such action is contrary to the UN Charter and international law. In April, 2003, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Arab League announced they would take the impending attack to the General Assembly. Then-Assembly President Jan Kavan said he was expecting a request for such a meeting momentarily.

Support for a General Assembly emergency session on Iraq based on Uniting for Peace became the focus of a multi-level global campaign. A few examples: The Russian Duma

passed a resolution calling for General Assembly intervention in Iraq. So did the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of Thailand.

A Greenpeace web petition at www.greenpeace.org calling for a General Assembly session has received 60,000 signatures worldwide within a few days.[2] Many of the huge demonstrations around the world against the Iraq war called for the General Assembly to meet under "Uniting for Peace." A demonstration in Santiago, Chile urged Chile's President to back a call for the United Nations General Assembly to hold a special session to "adopt moral sanctions against Bush." [3] A group of Italian Catholic associations (Azione Cattolica, Acli, Agesci, Pax Christi, Mcl, Forum Terzo Settore), allied in the organization "Sentinelle del mattino," petitioned the Italian government demanding that "the UN General Assembly be called to block, based on resolution 337 [Uniting for Peace], any action which does not comply with the UN Charter so as to bring peace." They appealed for "a ceasefire which will put an end to the useless massacre in Iraq." [4] International women's organizations, including MADRE, Women of Color Resource Center, Center for Women's Global Leadership, and the International Women's Human Rights Law Clinic joined other women's organizations worldwide to call for an emergency General Assembly meeting. "The resolve of many UN member states to stand firm against the US, reinforced by the call to enact Uniting for Peace, offer hope for a revitalized international system." [5]

The effort was scuttled by the U.S., which began "aggressively lobbying governments around the world" to "help head off an emergency assembly session on Iraq." [6] Greenpeace released the text of a communication from the United States to UN representatives around the world leaked by an "incensed" UN delegate. It stated, "Given the highly charged atmosphere, the United States would regard a General Assembly session on Iraq as unhelpful and as directed against the United States. Please know that this question as well as your position on it is important to the US." It warned/threatened that "the staging of such a divisive session could do additional harm to the UN." [7]

Virtually all the governments of the world publicly support an end to the Israeli attacks on Lebanon - a.k.a. an immediate ceasefire. The demand that they immediately initiate a Uniting for Peace resolution in the U.N. General Assembly could serve as a very concrete way for their citizens to pressure them to walk the walk as well as talk the talk.

Any country can start the ball rolling simply by asking the president of the General Assembly to convene an emergency session. The question is, will anyone have learned the lesson that appeasing aggression will only lead to more aggression.

A near-unanimous General Assembly vote would have a major effect on the U.S. public, policymakers, and elites, all of whom are seriously worried about the consequences of America's global isolation. And it would reposition the U.S. peace movement as a spokesperson for what the whole rest of the world believes.

Legal scholar Brendan Smith and historian Jeremy Brecher are the editors, with Jill Cutler, of "[In the Name of Democracy: American War Crimes in Iraq and Beyond](#)" (Metropolitan/Holt, 2005) (www.americanempireproject.com). Brendan Smith is a member of the [BRussells Tribunal Advisory Committee](#).

[1] Mideast talks 'fail to reach agreement' CNN, 7/26/06

[2] www.greepeace.org/news

[3] Mario Osava, "Brazil Leads Weekend of Anti-War Protests," Inter Press Service, March 30, 2003.

[4] "Catholics, Berelusconi Must Stop War," AGI, March 29, 2003.

[5] Press release from MADRE, March 28, 2003.

[6] Arieff.

[7] "Us to UN: Butt out," www.greenpeace.org/news April 1, 2003.

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